



Inmates Planting Flowers at Fairgrounds

May 29, 2014

By WICS NewsChannel 20

Preparations are underway for the 2014 Illinois State Fair, especially when it comes to sprucing up the fairgrounds.

There are approximately 190 flower beds that need to be filled with flowers in time for the state fair come August. It's a job that takes a lot of time, a lot of hard work and wouldn't be possible without the help from criminals.

Jeremiah Burgess, 29, may have a green thumb but also an orange shirt. He is an inmate at the Lincoln Correctional Center.

"I've been locked up four years now, trying to change my life," said Burgess.

With less than 60 days left behind bars, Burgess, along with 12 other inmates, grows seeds, plants, and waters about 150,000 flowers for the Illinois State Fairgrounds as well as various place throughout the capital city.

"For eight hours a day they get to come out and act like they have a job, they learn new things, new abilities and gives them drive," said correctional officer Jason Pollock.

To be selected for outer perimeter detail work, inmates are carefully screened, must be extremely well-behaved, and do not break rules while outside of their cells.

Most say it's a taste of freedom.

"This place here has helped me build some good work ethic and build some character," said Burgess.

It's a job that shows these former rule breakers that a little hard work will pay off.

"What's nice is that you start something from dirt and then you get to see it all bloomed and flowered and it actually gives them inspiration, and when they actually get to see it, it is something they can be proud of," said Pollock.

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The Illinois Department of Agriculture helps pay for the equipment used and some of the seeds, but most of the seeds are collected by inmates in the fall, grown in the greenhouse at the correctional center and then brought back in the spring to be planted.

Inmates and correctional officers come out seven days a week and will continue to work on the gardens throughout the summer.

The Illinois Department of Corrections has been doing the planting program for about two decades in hopes to prepare inmates for successful reentry into society when their incarceration is over.